



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE  
FOR THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 21, 2008**

**IN FAVOR OF:**

**H.B. No. 5416 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSITION OF CARE AND TREATMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES**

This testimony is submitted by the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance is a statewide, non-profit organization that works to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocates a safe, effective and fair system for those involved.

The Alliance would like to submit its support for H.B. 5416, Concerning the Transition of Care and Treatment of Children and Youth from the Department of Children and Families to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. is an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DCF and DMHAS regarding the transition of youth from DCF to DMHAS. HB 5416 will codify and expand upon this MOU to ensure that the agencies follow the established interagency agreements for the adequate transitioning of youth with mental health needs and create a way to hold those agencies accountable if the agreements are not followed. With the age of jurisdiction in juvenile court set to be raised to 18, it is important that these two agencies are working together in an efficient an effective way to meet the mental health needs of juvenile justice-involved youth. We know that approximately half of the boys and nearly ALL of the girls in the juvenile justice system have mental health involvement. Many youth become involved in the juvenile justice system because their mental health needs have not been addressed and their actions stemming from their illness have been criminalized.

H.B. 5416 will ensure early identification of transitioning youth, appropriate transition planning, and adequate follow up and monitoring. It will also establish clear timelines. Without clear timelines and without transparency, many youth with serious mental health needs continue to fall through the cracks. Despite the current MOU, many youth are still not referred to the DMHAS in a timely fashion, and even when transition plan are developed -- they are often poorly implemented or not implemented at all.

This bill also has the potential to change and improve practice by requiring both DCF and DMHAS to report annually to the legislature regarding the plan for transitioning youth from DCF to DMHAS and to provide information on outcomes and barriers.

For now, many young adults are falling victim to the gaps between the two systems—often resulting in their becoming homeless, incarcerated, dependent upon emergency care, and altogether abandoned by systems mandated to care for their welfare. This places our communities at risk at a much higher cost to the state. We are encouraged by the reporting standards included in HB 5416, and want to reinforce the absolute necessity of requiring DCF to report on the factors influencing what should be a continuum of care during the transition of vulnerable youth into the adult system. The behavioral health of this age group is the focus of national attention. We must have an understanding of their diagnostic profiles, service outcomes, gaps in services and treatment options, as well as the availability of qualified staff. This bill will help determine the barriers to timely referral, transition, and receipt of services. It will also better help both agencies understand the needs of juvenile or adult justice system involved youth as they transition into adulthood and are still in need of mental health care.

HB 5416 also calls for the development of a pilot program for youth and young adults with the most intensive mental health needs who require age-appropriate housing and services allowing them to transition between both DCF and DMHAS without mandated changes in their housing or services. We desperately need collaborative programming between DCF and DMHAS to ensure that 16-17 years olds are not forced to leave a stable home and service environment when they turn 18. Many of these young people have service needs related to both their psychiatric conditions and time spent institutionalized in hospitals or prisons. These young people CAN be independent adults and successful members of society with the right supports and transitioning services. Helping these young people succeed is much less expensive than the alternative, leaving them unsupported highly likely to end up institutionalized or incarcerated for most of their lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. HB 5416 will codify and expand upon There

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